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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

The Future of Bangla Desh

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
17 December 1971

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Future of Bangla Desh

The generally moderate and pro-Western Bangla Desh government, which will be installed in Dacca soon, is ill prepared to meet the staggering problems of the former Pakistani province. Since it was formed last April, the government's preoccupation with independence has precluded the development of a program for governing the new nation. The effort to develop such a program may well split the young government. In any case, the difficulty of the problems and the inexperience of the government do not bode well for Bangla Desh. Ultimately, the failure of the current leadership could pave the way for a growth of ultra-radical leftism.

Note: This memorandum was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated within CIA.

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Government and Political Groups

1. The Bangla Desh government is drawn exclusively from the Awami League, which led the struggle for provincial autonomy and swept the East Pakistani elections in December 1970. Its president, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, languishes in jail in West Pakistan, and in his absence Bangla Desh will be ruled by a group of men with little experience in the higher echelons of government. The group includes three former members of the provincial assembly, one of whom served briefly in the late 1950s as provincial justice minister, a former member of the national assembly, and a former deputy director of operations in the Pakistan Army.

2. Since its formation last April, both the demands of the liberation struggle and Indian pressure have tended to submerge differences within the government. It may be some time before clear-cut alignments emerge, but so far there appear to be three broad groups that will determine the government's policies.

3. Foreign Minister Kandakhar Mustaq Ahmad seems to be the leading figure among the relatively moderate, middle-class Awami League politicians who hold most of the offices in the Bangla Desh government. The senior Mukti Bahini commanders, including Defense Minister Mohammad Osmani who shared their exile in Calcutta, have usually sided with this group.

4. Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad is the key figure in a more leftist faction of the former exiles. Although he has less Bengali support than the moderates, Tajuddin has much closer ties with New Delhi. The strong backing he may well receive from India--and possibly the USSR--could enable him to play an influential role in the new government. Also important on the left is Muzaffar Ahmad, leader of a small pro-Soviet faction.

5. The guerrillas in the field could have an important voice in the shaping of the new state, but both their views and the degree to which they

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wish to become involved in politics remain unclear. Some of the officers and troops are professional military men without strong political or ideological views other than a dedication to Bangla Desh. Although many of them have criticized the political leaders who lived in comfortable exile while the guerrillas risked their lives, they may remain loyal to the moderate Bangla Desh leadership and be content to form the nucleus of an apolitical Bangla Desh Army.

6. Other guerrillas have probably been successfully proselytized by pro-Moscow Communists, and still others are ultra-radical leftists who would have looked to Peking for guidance had China not backed West Pakistan.

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7. The political parties to the left of the Awami League--such as Maulana Bashani's National Awami Party/Left--received few votes in the last elections and probably lack any strong popular or guerrilla backing. Nevertheless, they have been included in the Consultative Committee, which acts loosely as a policy planning group to the Bangla Desh regime. This committee was apparently created at Indian insistence. In talking with a US newsman, the head of the Bangla Desh mission in Calcutta implied that some leftist members of the committee would be brought into the cabinet. Within the cabinet, they would be likely to lend their support to Tajuddin Ahmad and the left wing of the Awami League. Rightist parties generally supported the West Pakistanis and are therefore totally discredited.

8. Eight months ago, Mujibur Rahman was the acknowledged leader not only of the Awami League but of all East Pakistan. Should the Pakistanis

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release him from prison and allow him to return to Dacca, he would again be the pre-eminent political figure in Bangla Desh. Still, he would face difficulties.

9. Actions have been taken in Mujib's name with which he may not agree. Tajuddin Ahmad reportedly was not Mujib's first choice for prime minister, and Tajuddin's rivals claim he was forced on the government by Mrs. Gandhi. An attempt by Mujib to move against Tajuddin would lead to friction within the government and new strains in relations with the Indians. On the other hand, if Mujib acquiesces in everything that has been done in his name, his former subordinates--now used to making decisions without him--may try to continue to exercise power and use him as a figurehead.

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10. In any case, with independence--the only issue on which the Bengalis are generally agreed--both ideological and personal rifts are likely to develop in the government.

Economic Problems

11. Even had Bangla Desh gained independence peacefully, its economic problems would still be staggering. One of the poorest nations on earth, it cannot feed its population even in good years. It has suffered severe natural disasters--e.g., several hundred thousand perished in a cyclone in the fall of 1970. Health standards are low, and epidemics are a constant threat. Road, rail, power transmission, and telecommunications facilities are inadequate.

12. Bangla Desh gained its independence after eight months of guerrilla war and a full-scale Indian invasion. Both the guerrillas and retreating Pakistani troops severely damaged the transportation system; even the inland water system has been disrupted by the loss of boats and the death or flight of boat operators. In some parts of the country, guerrilla and army activity prevented the

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harvesting of the fall crop or the planting of the next one, and the disruption of transportation has prevented the distribution of seeds, fertilizer, and pesticides. The country has managed to avoid famine, but this was partly due to the exodus of ten million refugees. Food distribution will remain a problem, and the return of even a million refugees will exacerbate the situation. But the combination of private stocks, renewed imports, and new harvests should again avert a food crisis. Plans are already being made to ensure that the refugee return is gradual, according to the Bangla Desh prime minister. In the fighting hundreds of villages have been destroyed, adding more displaced persons to those who fled to India.

13. The end of fighting will quickly ease some economic problems. For example, production in jute mills has been below normal, in part because workers were afraid to go to their jobs. This obstacle has been removed. Other problems, such as rebuilding the road and rail system, will require a good deal of foreign assistance. Some, such as the food and population problem, require long-range planning.

14. The government has announced that it will nationalize industries, but otherwise has developed no economic program. Even nationalization may be designed as a cover for seizing West Pakistani - owned property rather than as an economic policy.

Law and Order

15. During the past eight months, local administration and police functions broke down completely in East Pakistan. Some of the civil servants fled or were killed, others sided with the military government, and many remained in government service as much to hamstring the provincial administration as anything. The police became even more disorganized, joining either the government forces or the Mukti Bahini.

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16. In such a situation, village government became the responsibility of local guerrilla or Pakistan Army commanders, or it was handed over to councils representing only the small minority of East Pakistanis loyal to Islamabad. In most places, however, it simply ceased to function. The police were largely replaced by Razakars-- "licensed bandits," [REDACTED] who may have committed as many crimes as they prevented. Criminals masquerading either as Razakars or Mukti Bahini had a free hand in many places.

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17. With isolated bands of professional criminals, Razakars, and Biharis still operating in the country, the government faces a serious situation. But the Bengalis could be an even greater problem. The Biharis--non-Bengali East Pakistanis, most of whom supported Islamabad--have earned the hatred of the Bengalis. Mobs of Bengalis have already killed some Biharis, and unless the government can save most of the million or more others, international sympathy for Bangla Desh could dissipate quickly. President Nazrul Islam told an Indian newsman that Bengalis would surrender the vast quantity of weapons now in their hands, but he expressed apprehension about the safety of non-Bengalis.

Relations with India

18. Dacca's relations with New Delhi could bring the first major strains in the government. Indian troops have been greeted as liberators by the Bengalis, but this attitude could change quickly. Even during the liberation struggle, friction developed between the Bengalis and the Indians. The Mukti Bahini chafed at taking orders from the Indians, fretted over the long delay in open Indian military intervention, and resented Indian refusal to give the Mukti Bahini heavy weapons. The moderates in the Bangla Desh government disliked India's heavy-handed direction and clashed with Tajuddin Ahmad on issues such as supporting the Indo-Soviet treaty, the formation of the Consultative Committee,

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and the subordinate relationship of the Mukti Bahini to the Indian Army. Behind these specific issues lies a suspicion, probably justified, that India plans to control Bangla Desh in much the same way that it has tried to dominate Nepal and does dominate Bhutan.

19. East Bengali suspicions about Indian motives were overshadowed by dislike of the Punjabis of West Pakistan, but with the Punjabis no longer on the scene, Indian unpopularity may well grow. Despite its avowed secularism, the Bangla Desh government has tended to discriminate against Hindus. It was reluctant to recruit them for the Mukti Bahini, and Hindus hold no position of importance in the Bangla Desh government or in the Awami League. In addition, all Bengalis--both Muslim and Hindu--resent domination by the Hindi-speaking northern Indians. This resentment has been one cause of the civil disorder and Communist strength in the neighboring Indian state of West Bengal.

20. Until the West Pakistanis imposed restrictions, East Bengal's commerce was closely tied to India and New Delhi is almost certain to seek a return to this pattern. India would replace West Pakistan as the major source of Bangla Desh imports; raw jute exports would again be sent to mills in the Calcutta area; and tea from India's state of Assam would again be transported on Bangla Desh's rivers. The Indians could legitimately claim that such an arrangement is more natural than the politically inspired trade patterns of the recent past. Indian economic influence in Bangla Desh could also be projected through technical assistance. Bangla Desh may well find its economy largely dependent on its larger neighbor.

21. Much will depend on events in the immediate future. India will be a major supplier of technical and economic assistance to Bangla Desh in that period. The Bengalis can hardly refuse this much-needed help, and the Soviets--as in Nepal--are likely to support the Indians rather than compete with New Delhi. Despite some resentment over Chinese and

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American positions during the liberation struggle Dacca may soon seek economic help from both, not only to prevent Indian domination but also because New Delhi is unlikely to be able to meet the needs of Bangla Desh.

22. India may also try to assume a special role in preserving stability in Bangla Desh. Although New Delhi probably does not want to be responsible for the domestic problems of Bangla Desh, it will have difficulty ignoring widespread disorders there. According to the press, an Indian Government spokesman said that Indian troops would remain in Bangla Desh "until normalcy is restored, until the task set for the army is fully done, until the health and municipal services are restored and the refugees are repatriated."

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Relations With Others

23. Bangla Desh is anxious to secure formal recognition, but even without recognition may be willing to allow foreign diplomatic missions to remain in Dacca. The Bengalis are annoyed with the UN, both because of its failure to agree to pro-Bengali resolutions and because of suspicions that the UN relief mission in the East aided the Pakistan Army. They may therefore be slow in seeking UN membership. According to the Bangla Desh High Commissioner in Calcutta, "If they want us, let them recognize us."

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24. Most of the Awami League leaders were pro-American as late as last year and actively sought US support before fighting began in March 1971. Disappointment with US policy has grown since then, and in recent weeks Bangla Desh radio has attacked Washington for supporting West Pakistan and has even accused the US of having instigated Islamabad's repressive policies in order to gain a firm hold on East Bengal. Nevertheless, Tajuddin Ahmad told an American newsmen that he hoped US economic assistance would be forthcoming, although, he added, Bangla Desh could seek aid "elsewhere."

25. If the USSR follows the pattern of its relations with Nepal, it will try to maintain some degree of influence in Bangla Desh but will refrain from any action likely to antagonize the Indians. Until now, the Soviets have worked through the Indians rather than directly with the Bengalis.

26. Peking supported West Pakistan throughout the independence struggle and will be reluctant to risk its position in Islamabad by attempting to establish close relations with Dacca. For their part, the Bengalis--including the radical Communists--have little reason to like the Chinese. A shift leftward in Bangla Desh could, however, change the outlook of both parties.

Outlook

27. Perhaps no government could solve the problems of East Bengal, and the new government is handicapped by lack of experience and resources. As conditions in the province worsen, the main alternatives would seem to be a growth of leftism or increased Indian intervention. Either would again make Bangla Desh a major trouble spot.

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